CHARITY AND COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL CAMBRIDGE

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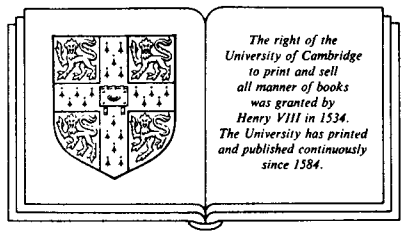

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INTRODUCTION

That charity was a central preoccupation for medieval men and women is indisputable. In England alone some 220 hospitals were founded in the twelfth century and some 310 in the thirteenth.[1] The donors who endowed and maintained them were granting gifts, allocating property, bestowing food, money, clothes and spiritual care upon strangers, apparently denying themselves some comfort for the sake of others. Some would say that selfless denial is the crux of charity, in that it involves giving with no expectation of reward; and medieval preachers criticised those who 'sold' their alms in return for social acclaim.[2] However, gift-giving was also part of the symbolic articulation of social and personal relations, and is at any time an act of self-expression, of the presentation of one's innermost values.[3] Charity cannot be satisfactorily understood as a purely altruistic act since gift-giving is so rich in rewards to the giver. Gifts play an important role in maintaining social cohesion, peace and order; they are major tools for forging friendships and alliances.[4] With most social acts, gift-giving shares the quality of reciprocity and exchange,[5] while, on a personal level, it

[1] This is the minimal estimate counting only houses for which direct evidence of existence and of the period of foundation has survived. It is based on the list of hospitals compiled in D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: England and Wales* (London, edn of 1971), pp. 250–324.

[2] On the element of altruism in human behaviour see D. Collard, *Altruism and economy. A study in non-selfish economics* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 4–5. For an example of a view of charity as a unilateral act see O. Checkland, *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland: social welfare and the voluntary principle* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 1–2 and *passim*.

[3] The psychological content of gift-giving has been studied in B. Schwartz, 'The social psychology of the gift', *Americal journal of sociology* 73 (1967–8), pp. 1–11; pp. 2–3.

[4] See the classic study on the nature of gifts, M. Mauss, *The gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*, trans. I. Cunnison (London, 1966), pp. 17–18; M. D. Sahlins, 'On the sociology of primitive exchange', in *The relevance of models for social anthropology*, ed. M. Banton (London, 1965), pp. 139–236; pp. 139–43, 174–9. For a close study of a society maintaining a gift economy and the social implications of it see C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and commodities* (Cambridge, 1982).

[5] C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The principle of reciprocity', in *Sociological theory: A book of readings*, ed. L. A. Coser and B. Rosenberg (New York, 1957), pp. 84–94.

portrays one's identity.[6] Gift-exchange maintains a society in a constant state of debt,[7] criss-crossed by a network of obligations and expectations of yet unfulfilled reciprocal gestures which bind it closely.[8] Charity as a form of gift-giving is similarly an act rich in meaning.

The study of charity is related to the current interest in the investigation of all groups of medieval society, an interest which has brought to the forefront of research not only the mass of peasants and craftsmen, but also marginal groups such as the poor.[9] Inasmuch as charity bound the poor and the rich together, its study can lead to a better appreciation of the nature of poverty and social relations. This is an indirect approach, through documentation emanating primarily from institutions founded by, or wills composed by the more comfortable members of society, merely one side of the charitable encounter. The danger of paternalism is inherent in any such attempt to capture an entity through an 'oblique' approach, but can be reduced by awareness of the biases embedded in our sources as well as in our method of studying them.[10]

Besides the wish to understand poverty and its relief, this study has

[6] M. P. Banton, *Roles. An introduction to the study of social relations* (London, 1965), p. 2. For a beautiful expression of this idea, from Emerson's essay on gifts: R. W. Emerson, 'Gifts', in *Emerson's essays* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1936), p. 358: 'The only gift is a portion of thyself... Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd his lamb; the farmer corn;... the girl a handkerchief of her own sewing. This is right and pleasing, for it restores society in so far to its primary basis, when a man's biography is conveyed in a gift.'

[7] Mauss, *The gift*, p. 11 and Schwartz, 'The social psychology', pp. 5–6. On gift-giving in the early Middle Ages and its economic impact see P. Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages: a critique of the evidence', *Studies in economic anthropology*, ed. G. Dalton (Washington, D.C., 1971), pp. 74–83; esp. 77–8 [originally published in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 9 (1959), pp. 123–40]. Mauss, *The gift*, p. 11; if unreciprocated it can wound one's pride, pp. 41, 63. Exaggerated gifts can function as signs of aggression, when one of the partners is denied, *a priori*, the ability to reciprocate adequately, *ibid.*, p. 127. For an expression of the inherent exchange nature of the charitable encounter see an example of gratitude by beggars in a Mexican village, G. M. Foster 'The dyadic contract: a model for the social structure of a Mexican peasant village', in *Peasant Society. A reader*, ed. J. M. Potter, M. N. Diaz and G. M. Foster (Boston, Mass., 1967), pp. 213–30.

[8] It also raises the interesting question of whether medieval charity was part of a 'restricted' system of exchange, occurring solely between individuals, or a 'generalised' one, comprising a complex and multilateral network of transactions. On these terms and the social theories which gave rise to them see P. Ekeh, *Social exchange theory* (London, 1974), pp. 37–60.

[9] See for example the essays collected in J. Le Goff, *Pour un autre moyen âge. Temps, travail et culture en Occident* (Paris, 1977), and the view expressed in the preface, pp. 7–15.

[10] P. Burke, 'Oblique approaches to the history of popular culture', in *Approaches to popular culture*, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby (London, 1976), pp. 69–84.

been inspired by a preoccupation with the effect of religious ideas on works and practice. The study of charity is a case in which the effect of normative religious teaching and its internalisation can be examined. The activity spurred by the resounding teaching on charity can be a measure not only of the nature and forms of understanding and interpretation of religious and social ideas, but of the ability exhibited by the laity to integrate changing circumstances of life with prevalent moral and religious norms.

Viewing a society as a whole is a pursuit adopted from anthropological method, which has taught us to respect every facet of life and to seek rigorous explanation of the relations between apparently separate areas of human activity, producing what has come to be known as 'total history'. The modern dialogue between historians and anthropologists has shown both how to rid ourselves of some of the dangers of anachronistic judgement by attempting to evaluate those terms of analysis relevant in a different culture. It is through the application of values alien to the period that mixed assessments of medieval charity have arisen. Even Michel Mollat was tempted to voice them, and hastened to qualify his description of acts of charity: 'Charitable they are, but of what type of charity? The egocentric charity of a person who purchases his salvation with alms, or caring compassion? Perhaps one ought not and indeed cannot try to discover. All is in all, and all is intertwined'.[11]

Early research on charity was inspired by Michel Mollat in his seminar on Poverty in the Middle Ages at the Sorbonne in the 1960s. His students produced seminal studies on the image of poverty, on voluntary poverty and on poor relief examining an array of legal, theological, literary, and artistic sources. They soon recognised the importance of charitable institutions as a mirror of the life of the poor and as an expression of prevailing views on social and religious obligations. Thus, in the last two decades local and regional studies of charitable activity, mainly by French and Belgian historians, have broadened our view of the contacts between rich and poor through the forms of relief.[12] A lesson which can be drawn from these early

[11] 'Charitables, elles le sont, mais de quelle charité? La charité égocentrique de celui qui marchande son salut avec l'aumône, ou la miséricorde aimante? Peut-être ne faut-il pas et ne peut-on pas chercher? Tout est en tout, et tout s'entremêle', M. Mollat, 'En guise de préface: les problèmes de la pauvreté', in Mollat, *Etudes* 1, pp. 11–30; p. 30.

[12] Some of Michel Mollat's methodological guidelines have been expressed in M. Mollat, 'La notion de la pauvreté au moyen-âge. Position de problèmes', *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France* 52 (1966), pp. 5–23 as well as Mollat, 'En guise de préface', pp. 11–30.

works, and which underlies this study, is that charitable activities must be seen against the background of prevailing understanding of property, community, salvation – the mentality subsumed in every act of members of a particular society.[13] The attempt to unravel the practice of charity must be related both to the economic and physical environment, but also to the ideas and perceptions through which it was conceived.

Medieval men and women were exposed to an eloquent message of charity which they blended into their quest for spiritual salvation and social acceptance and harmony.[14] J. Rosenthal, who has studied charitable giving by the English aristocracy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, has argued that their benevolence was largely wasted

His pupils have been producing seminal papers on poverty and charity many of which have been collected in Mollat, *Etudes*. Monographs on charity in Continental towns such as Bonenfant, *Hôpitaux et bienfaisance publiques*, J. H. Mundy, 'Charity and social work in Toulouse 1100–1250', *Traditio* 22 (1966), pp. 203–87; N. Gonthier, *Lyon et ses pauvres au moyen-âge (1350–1500)* (Lyon, 1978); J. Caille, *Hôpitaux et charité publique à Narbonne au moyen-âge* (Toulouse, 1978); A. Rubio Vella, *Probreza, enfermedad e y assistencia hospitaliaria en la Valencia del siglo XIV* (Valencia, 1984) have followed. The growing interest in charity guided the conveners of the 1978 session of the Fanjeaux Conferences 'Assistance et charité', the proceedings of which appeared in *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 13 (1978) as well as the 1979 and 1980 colloquia of the European University Institute on 'Poverty and urban development in Europe, 15th–19th centuries' and on 'Reaction of the poor to poverty'. The better documented *ancien régime* has produced studies of poverty and its contemporary treatment such as J.-P. Gutton, *La société et les pauvres: l'exemple de la généralité de Lyon, 1534–1789* (Paris, 1971); *idem, L'état et la mendicité dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle. Auvergne, Beaujolais, Forez, Lyonnais* (Saint-Etienne, 1973) and C. C. Fairchilds, *Poverty and charity in Aix-en-Provence 1640–1789* (Baltimore, Md, 1976). Many studies of particular rural and urban institutions of charity in the Low Countries have been undertaken by the contributors to the *Annales de la société belge de l'histoire des hôpitaux* founded by Paul Bonenfant in 1963. Yet his complaint 'malgré ces intérêts si multiples l'histoire des hôpitaux n'a pas, jusqu'à présent, donné lieu à des ouvrages de synthèse' (Bonenfant, *Hôpitaux et bienfaisance publiques*, p. 5) still held when this study was started.

[13] For a similar structure of a study of charity which, like the present one, stresses the connection between the ideological and the economic circumstances of charity see L. Martz, *Poverty and welfare in Habsburg Spain. The example of Toledo* (Cambridge, 1983). On the problem of context in historical research and on the perils of normative judgements see H. Geertz, 'An anthropology of religion and magic. 1', *Journal of interdisciplinary history* 6 (1975–6), pp. 71–89; N. Z. Davis, 'Some tasks and themes in the study of popular religion', in *The pursuit of holiness in late medieval and Renaissance religion*, ed. C. Trinkaus and H. Oberman (Leiden, 1974), pp. 307–36, at pp. 307–12. Also E. P. Thompson, 'Anthropology and the discipline of historical context', *Midland history* 1 (1972), pp. 41–55.

[14] For the relevance of current religious sensitivities for understanding of charity see G. Constable's view: 'Philanthropy cannot be studied apart from the doctrines of expiation and penance', G. Constable, 'Wealth and philanthropy in late medieval England. Review of J. Rosenthal, *The purchase of paradise*', *Journal of interdisciplinary history* 4 (1973–4), pp. 597–602, at p. 599.

owing to the nobility's failure to harness it to the furtherance of its political and social status.[15] In condemning their adherence to traditional forms of charity, Professor Rosenthal imputes to the aristocracy a predisposition towards change which is questionable. The analysis also underestimates the prominence of intercession not only as a form of display, but as an element of late medieval spirituality. Prayers for the soul were of undeniable importance and their pursuit was uppermost in the minds of benefactors as much for the rich display which they offered as for their spiritual efficacy.[16] In addition, the maintenance of a whole network of intercession in itself increased the sphere and the scope of influence of those able to supply generous doles, build magnificent chantries and maintain a host of chantry-chaplains.[17]

Another approach to the measurement and analysis of charity was tested in W. K. Jordan's studies of Tudor and early Stuart philanthropy. Through the use of a large number of wills (35,000) he examined changes in charitable activity and intent.[18] This mammoth statistical study produced a hierarchy of charitable undertakings according to their frequency and attempted to evaluate the degree of charitable disposition throughout the period by the aggregate charitable expenditure and by forms and recipients of charity.[19] The professed aim of

[15] J. Rosenthal, *The purchase of paradise: gift giving and the aristocracy, 1307–1485* (London, 1972), esp. pp. 130–2.

[16] For a more integrated view of the nobility's gift-giving see K. B. McFarlane, *The nobility of later medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 95–6, who believes that the nobility had reached a coherent balance between 'soul and flesh'.

[17] To judge its effect charitable expenditure should be seen against the background of their whole expenditure. The limitation to one class and to a single activity robbed this study of charity of its full social context. For a short and close study of charitable benefactions of one class of one county, the gentry of Yorkshire, see M. G. A. Vale, *Piety, charity and literacy among the Yorkshire gentry, 1370–1480* (York, 1976).

[18] W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660* (London, 1959); *idem*, *The charities of London, 1480–1660* (London, 1960); *idem*, *The charities of rural England 1480–1660* (London, 1961).

[19] See the reviews: L. Stone, in *History* 44 (1959), pp. 257–60; p. 260 as well as G. R. Elton, in *Historical journal* 3 (1960), pp. 89–92; p. 91 and R. Ashton, in *History* 46 (1961), pp. 136–9 and D. C. Coleman, in *Economic history review* second ser. 13 (1960–1), pp. 113–15; esp. pp. 113–14, and on Jordan's useful approach to poverty, p. 115. For a general discussion of Jordan's main findings see J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English people* (Oxford, 1984), p. 187, n. 38.

The ways in which Professor Jordan handled his data have been subjected to serious criticism, yet useful ideas and possible approaches to charity were raised, and some were taken up in the ensuing debate. An adjustment of Jordan's data by a price index showed no increase in charitable giving between 1480 and 1660, W. G. Bittle and R. T. Lane, 'Inflation and philanthropy in England: a reassessment of W. K. Jordan's data', *Economic history review* second ser. 29 (1976), pp. 203–10, at pp. 207–9; and a decline in *per capita* giving may very well be the truer picture, D. C. Coleman, 'Philanthropy

placing charity in its social, political and religious contexts was to reach a truer understanding of its nature. Unfortunately, this recognition was not fully embraced in the interpretation of his findings. The view of the London merchants as pious and honourable and increasingly charitable is simplistic and does not do justice to the sophisticated way in which they manipulated their giving for the furtherance of social and economic goals.[20]

These two interesting approaches to charity show that we are usually much better informed about the identity of the giver, the founder, donor or testator, than we are of the recipients. Who were the poor, the other half of the exchange, and how can we hope to encounter them? It was widely held in the Middle Ages, as it is by many modern economists, that poverty is to be measured relatively, in comparison with the comfort and security of others.[21] From this relative vantage point, poverty is seen as the want of something which can be reasonably expected, and medieval writers accepted the expectations usually associated with a person's status and possessed by his social peers as a reasonable measure. Understanding this view yields useful insights into the underlying logic of definitions of poverty adopted in particular medieval contexts.[22] In Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon society the majority of people existed on the edge of subsistence and lived in closely-knit rural communities in which every man was protected by his lord and his kin. In such a society the small freeholders of land who could support themselves and their families, but who were not protected by a lord and were not ensconced within a community of equally situated neighbours, were deemed to be the poor.[23] It was they

deflated: a comment', *Economic history review* second ser. 31 (1978), pp. 118–23; esp. p. 119.

[20] On the way in which this simple view obscures rather than enlightens our understanding of the merchant class mentality see Elton, 'Review', p. 90.

[21] For the relative approach see M. Rein, 'Problems in the definition and measurement of poverty', in *The concept of poverty*, ed. P. Townsend (London, 1970), pp. 46–63; p. 46 and C. A. Valentine, *Culture and poverty. Critique and counter-proposals* (Chicago and London, 1969), p. 126. For a discussion of the development of a relative view of poverty expressed in the notion of *pauperes verecundi* see G. Ricci, 'La naissance du pauvre honteux: entre l'histoire des idées et l'histoire sociale', *Annales* 38 (1983), pp. 158–77.

[22] For a discussion of the subjective elements incorporated in any definition of poverty see P. Mathias, 'Adam's burden: diagnoses of poverty in post-medieval Europe and the Third World now', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 89 (1976), pp. 149–60; pp. 149–51.

[23] K. Bosl, '"Potens" und "Pauper". Begriffsgeschichtliche Studien zur gesellschaftlichen Differenzierung im frühen Mittelalters und zum "Pauperismus" des Hochmittelalters', in *Alteuropa und die moderne Gesellschaft. Festschrift für Otto Brunner* (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 60–87; *passim* and esp. pp. 61–70. R. Le Jan-Hennebicque, '"Pauperes" et "paupertas" dans l'occident carolingien aux IXe et Xe siècles', *Revue du Nord* 50 (1968),

who were labelled *pauperes*, in their precarious personal security, rather than the landless or serfs, who were physically poorer but who were not obliged to compete, either economically or politically, as free men.[24]

Following this understanding of contemporary views of relative need, it is clear that the medieval definition of poverty was bound to change in response to the changing characteristics of rural and urban indigence, and it should also transcend views which emanate predominantly from a particular class. Drawing the relative view to its logical conclusion we must think of well-being in terms of possession of or lack of capabilities to function: 'Voluntary or involuntary poverty can be defined as a permanent or temporary situation of weakness, dependence and meekness, characterised by deprivation of minimal means (differing by period and by society) necessary for personal security and dignity, for intellectual capability...and for social relations'.[25] Thus, Michel Mollat, in a definition similar to the one which Amartya Sen, the student of Third World poverty, has suggested.[26] To Sen, well-being is not mere physical functioning, rather it is the capability to function *effectively* and to maintain some control over one's environment, the ability to take part in social life, to move

pp. 169–87 and J.-C. Dufermont, 'Les pauvres, d'après les sources anglo-saxonnes du VIIe au XIe siècles', *Revue du Nord* 50 (1968), pp. 189–201. For a similar use of the terms in the early Byzantine world see E. Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles* (Paris, 1977), pp. 25–35.

[24] Still, serfs were objectively poorer than the *pauperes*! Carolingian capitularies and ecclesiastical legislation demanded that bishops protect *pauperes* in legal procedures and alleviate the burden of frequent attendance in court sessions, clearly a reference to free proprietors, see J. Devisse, '"Pauperes" et "paupertas" dans le monde carolingien: ce qu'en dit Hincmar de Reims', *Revue du Nord* 48 (1966), pp. 273–87; pp. 274–7. This understanding of poverty is summarised by B. Geremek: 'Le pauvre, ce n'est pas seulement l'individu dépourvu de moyens d'existence, c'est *aussi* l'individu le plus faible dans un groupe ou dans une société', B. Geremek, 'Le renfermement des pauvres en Italie (XIVe-XVIIe siècle): remarques préliminaires', in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel. Histoire économique du monde méditerranéen 1450–1650* I (Toulouse, 1973), pp. 205–17; p. 205.

[25] 'La pauvreté, volontaire ou involontaire, peut être définie ainsi: une situation permanente ou temporaire, de faiblesse, de dépendence et d'humilité, caractérisée par la privation du minimum de moyens, variables selon les époques et les sociétés, nécessaires à la sécurité et à la dignité personnelles, la capacité intellectuelle,... les relations sociales', M. Mollat, 'Pauvres et assistés au moyen-âge', in *A pobreza e a assistência aos pobres na Península Ibérica durante a Idade Média* I (Lisbon, 1973), pp. 11–27; p. 12; repeated in Mollat, 'En guise de préface', p. 12. For an attempt to classify the medieval poor see N. Gonthier, 'Les hôpitaux et les pauvres à la fin du moyen-âge: l'exemple de Lyon', *Le moyen-âge* 84 (1978), pp. 279–308; pp. 300–6.

[26] As expressed in the Boutwood Lectures delivered at Cambridge on 2 and 3 November 1983 on the subject 'Liberty, Utility and Freedom' and in the Tanner Lectures 'The standard of living' delivered in Cambridge on 11–12 March, 1985.

and improve one's fortune. At its fullest, well-being is tantamount to positive freedom.[27] In some periods freedom and welfare are undermined primarily by lack of security, in others by sheer physical indigence. At any time the privation of such basic capabilities creates a dependence of the poor on what society takes to be its 'altruism', its charitable prerogative, and ultimately on those who are to undertake it.

The poor became more noticeable as towns grew in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries and reached the limits of their medieval expansion by the end of the thirteenth century. The localised nature of the ever-present existence at subsistence level in earlier centuries, rendered it almost invisible, but now it was giving way to a more complex social and economic reality, through changes which will be surveyed in chapter 2.[28] Towns attracted migrants from an ever-more populous countryside to create a large supply of labour which subsequently produced falling wages and urban indigence. Jacques of Vitry, that keen observer of early thirteenth-century social and religious life, described the poor urban layman as: 'He who by working with his two hands acquires his meagre daily bread and has nothing left over after dining'.[29] Thomas Aquinas gives a similar definition of the poor: 'Workers who hire out their labour are poor, they seek their daily bread by their exertion'.[30] This urban labourer working in unfavourable conditions and earning too little to sustain a family, did not fall into the categories of poverty honoured by the Church, which were largely based on the realities of a rural economy and society. The prosperous townsman with funds to spare was able not only to live comfortably but to make choices, to take initiatives, even to spend some of his money on others. These freedoms were denied the poor, and were more than a mere physical

[27] He does allow for the effect of climate, custom, sex and region in determining a particular person's welfare.

[28] For some stimulating remarks on this change see C. Violante, 'Riflessioni sulla povertà nel secolo XI', in *Studi sul medioevo cristiano offerti a Raffaello Morghen* II (Rome, 1974), pp. 1061–81; esp. pp. 1062–3, 1070–9. Violante connects the earlier urbanisation of Italy with the first stirrings of discussions of voluntary poverty there, *ibid.*, p. 1080.

[29] 'qui, propriis manibus laborando, victum tenuem omni die sibi acquirebat, nec ei plusquam cenaret quicquam remanebat', Jacques of Vitry, *The exempla or illustrative stories from the 'sermones vulgares' of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. T. F. Crane (London, 1890), p. 27. This is an 'absolute' view of poverty shared by B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: a study in town life* (London, 1910), p. 86: 'Poverty is an income insufficient to obtain the minimal necessaries for maintenance of merely physical efficiency' and L. Génicot, 'Sur le nombre des pauvres dans les campagnes médiévales', *Revue historique* 522 (1977), pp. 273–88; p. 273.

[30] 'Mercenarii qui locant opera sua, pauperes sunt, de laboribus suis victum quaerentibus quotidianum', *Summa theologiae* II–II q. 105 a. 2 ad. 6.

state. The problem of social imagery and its relation to reality has been eloquently raised by Georges Duby and discussed further by Jacques Le Goff. Le Goff argues persuasively that in twelfth- and thirteenth-century society, and mainly the urban milieu, new schemes of social, moral and political classifications came to replace conservative dualities – *potens–pauper, laicus–clericus* and *paradisum–infernum*.[31] People came to think in the sophisticated terminology of a more differentiated and varied society,[32] and in parallel intellectual inquiry reached into new social, religious and political spheres.[33] The discussions of charity were slower in adopting the more complex view; in exhortation towards almsgiving the pair *dives et pauper* remained, unwittingly expressing the ever-growing gap separating those able and those unable to support themselves.[34] By the thirteenth century, even this moral and economic opposition was questioned and qualified, but it served in the *exempla* of thirteenth-century mendicant preaching, which was the main tool of instruction and of dissemination of the charitable imperative.[35]

St Francis represented most powerfully the view that the poor were to be cherished and valued, recognising both the wretched misery of poverty and its power to purify and raise the human spirit.[36] The

[31] J. Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), pp. 304–10. This observation lies at the basis of his analysis of the emergence of *purgatorium*, the 'middle place', in the late twelfth century.

[32] They also diversified old and static social classifications; see Bosl, '"Potens" und "pauper"', pp. 70, 87.

[33] A complex picture of the social body emerges from the variety of audiences to which the writers of *sermones ad status* such as Humbert of Romans and Jacques of Vitry addressed themselves, J. Le Goff, 'Le vocabulaire des catégories sociales chez St. François d'Assise et ses biographes du XIIIe siècle', in *Ordres et classes. Colloque d'histoire sociale de St. Cloud, 24–25 Mai 1967* (Paris, 1973), pp. 93–123; p. 106 and in the same volume P. Michaud-Quantin, 'Le vocabulaire des catégories sociales chez les canonistes et les moralistes du XIIIe siècle', pp. 73–86, at pp. 83–5.

[34] Mendicant preaching utilised the power of simple and stark opposing terms in their preaching, like the basic *bonum–malum*, see L. E. Boyle, 'Three English pastoral *summae* and a "Magister Galienus"', *Studia gratiana* II, *Collectanea Stephan Kuttner* I (Bologna, 1967), pp. 133–44; pp. 135, 136–7. On the dichotomy *dives–pauper* in the minds of canonists see Michaud-Quantin, 'Le vocabulaire des catégories sociales', pp. 80–1, and for the later Middle Ages see M. Moisa, 'Fourteenth-century preachers' views of the poor: class or status group?', in *Culture, ideology and politics. Essays for E. Hobsbawm* ed. R. Samuel and G. S. Jones (London, 1983), p. 160–75; p. 164.

[35] Mollat, 'En guise de préface', pp. 14–15.

[36] D. Flood, 'Poverty in the Middle Ages', *Collectanea franciscana* 43 (1973), pp. 409–15. See also V. Turner, *Dramas, fields and metaphors: symbolic action in human society* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1974), pp. 234–5. Poverty could also be a destabilising force when preached to the masses of poor as a reason for rebellion. On the connection between religious heresies and the idea of voluntary poverty see T. Manteuffel, *Naissance d'une hérésie: les adeptes de la pauvreté volontaire au moyen-âge*, trans. A. Posner (Paris, 1970), *passim*; esp. pp. 101–2. See also C. Thouzellier, 'Hérésie et pauvreté à la fin du XIIe et au début du XIIIe siècle', in Mollat, *Etudes* I, pp. 371–88.

intensification of religious instruction in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, expressed in forms and conveying a message which will be discussed in chapter 3, underlay the accelerated charitable activity witnessed in this period.[37] The rights of the poor to receive charity were undisputed by canonists and preachers, although few recognised them as positive rights and differing scales of merit coexisted in their writings and sermons.[38] Traditional teaching on charity also imposed an obligation on the poor: they were to guard themselves from envy and sloth and be humble, to be worthy of their task as intercessors for the benefactor's soul. It is the ability of both parties to fulfil their respective parts in an exchange which fed and sustained the act. Men and women were faced not only with the need to accommodate their personal inclinations and resources to charitable expectations, but also to fit their observations of real poverty around them, with the teachings of the Church and the needs of their community. In periods of change and reevaluation of social relations, the image of the poor reciprocating partners, as well as the ability to apportion funds to almsgiving was reassessed. When potential givers failed to trust the merit and disposition of the poor as social and charitable partners, a sort of moral dissonance would set in making them reluctant to initiate what was becoming a rather insecure transaction. At the same time irritation with their own lapses from the charitable norm would be generated.

A solution to this embarrassment could be found in a reformulation of duties, the creation of alternative forms for the exhibition of piety, and the development of a social theory which would rationalise their unwillingness to alleviate the real poverty around them. By reasoning that the poor were sinful, unruly, lazy and generally undeserving, by dispossessing the poor from the title *pauperes Christi*, an understanding could be effected which liberated those better off from responsibility for relief. An additional consequence would be the creation of some alternative charitable forms, which were pious phrases but which

[37] On social sanction and cooperation in society see Banton, *Roles*, p. 2; T. B. Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*, intr. J. K. Galbraith (edn of Boston, Mass., 1973), p. 217; B. Pullan, *Rich and poor in Renaissance Venice. The social institutions of a catholic state, to 1620* (Oxford, 1971), p. 317.

[38] On the diverse views of poverty in the late Middle Ages see C.-M. de La Roncière, 'Pauvres et pauvreté à Florence au XIVe siècle', in Mollat, *Etudes* II, pp. 661–745. On the development of the concept of natural rights and its influence on attitudes towards property see R. Tuck, *Natural rights theories. Their origin and development* (Cambridge, 1979), which suggests a meaningful breakthrough in the fourteenth century, while an early date and more intricate development are suggested in B. Tierney, 'Tuck on rights: some medieval problems', *History of political thought* 4 (1983), pp. 429–41.

effectively benefited a group more acceptable to potential givers.[39] It will be interesting to see how the charitable exchange weathers the stormy changes of late medieval economic and social life. The earlier charitable solutions within urban hospitals will be examined in chapters 4–6, and the later forms, most of which existed outside institutions of charity, will be studied in chapter 7.

Most intense charitable activity was manifested in the period when the concepts of purgatory, of the efficacy of prayers for the dead and of the spiritual utility of good works, were being defined, discussed and more widely taught. In the society which absorbed these terms, the charitable exchange was deemed a profitable undertaking and *dives* and *pauper* were frequently represented in art, literature and theology, engaged in the fulfilment of their roles.[40] This formal ascription of moral value and a social role to the poor would combine with the shared family, work and survival experiences to reinforce a 'culture of poverty'.[41] Their sense of identity was reinforced, wrought and maintained, by the shared experience of urban mendicancy or rural indigence, from frequent meeting in the rounds of distribution, doles and funerary attendance as well as by the external views which other groups projected onto them.[42] The changing economic and social world of the later Middle Ages entailed reexamination which generated change in these same roles and in relations between classes, as mentalities were touched and refashioned.[43]

In towns money changed hands rapidly, journeymen sought employ-

[39] On the value set on poverty in the thirteenth century see Mollat, 'La notion de la pauvreté au moyen-âge', p. 10.

[40] M.-L. Thérel, '"Caritas" et "paupertas" dans l'iconographie médiévale inspirée de la psychomachie', in Mollat, *Etudes* I, pp. 295–317. On the rise of these categories see M. Mollat, 'Hospitalité et assistance au début du XIIIe siècle', *Actes du symposium 'Poverty in the Middle Ages'*, ed. D. Flood (Paderborn, 1975), pp. 37–51; p. 37.

[41] Valentine, *Culture and poverty*, pp. 15–21. See the observations in O. Lewis, *The children of Sanchez* (Harmondsworth, 1961), pp. xxiv–xxviii. On some social and psychological attributes of poverty see D. Matza, 'The disreputable poor', in *Class, status and power: social status in comparative perspective*, ed. R. Bendix and S. M. Lipset (London, 1967), pp. 289–302.

[42] On the attribution of characteristics to the poor by other classes see R. Houston, 'Vagrants and society in early modern England', *Cambridge anthropology* 6 (1980), pp. 18–32. For a discussion of views of poverty and its solutions among late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers see J. R. Poynter, *Society and pauperism. English ideas on poor relief, 1795–1834* (Toronto, 1969), pp. ix–xxvi.

[43] On the changing evaluation of categories of poverty as expressed within *Piers Plowman* see D. Aers, '*Piers Plowman* and problems in the perception of poverty: a culture in transition', *Leeds studies in English* new ser. 14 (1983), pp. 5–25. On the role of the poor see G. Simmel, *On individuality and social forms*, ed. D. N. Levine (Chicago and London, 1971), p. 178.

ment, villagers sold and bought and mingled with townsfolk, merchants passed through sometimes carrying new ideas as well as cloth in their panniers, friars preached and the poor assembled and begged.[44] Towns witnessed intensive economic activity and a greater variety of social situations; in them existed deeper and more evident indigence, on the one hand, and more frequent and vehement exhortation towards charity, on the other.[45] Throughout their period of growth towns attracted men and women from their surroundings, but the scope of livelihood which towns could offer to newcomers altered dramatically throughout the period under study. By the end of the thirteenth century there were few jobs, mostly low-paid, which caused a new and more noticeable kind of distress; the weak, the unemployed and unemployable, women and dependents, were removed from family and community help.[46] Some of the needy exhibited the signs of poverty which friars encouraged their urban audiences to alleviate. They occasionally exerted pressures on civil authorities, and regularly burdened parish relief and touched a human compassion rendered more sensitive by frequent and effective teaching. The urban milieu and the spiritual challenges which it raised were the ground on which new means for salvation were created but in their limited and crowded spaces, anxieties could erode the spirit of cooperation and altruism.[47] In periods of prosperity charity loomed large in them, and as in all areas of town life the parallel activities of high and low, of the great men

[44] For some studies of charity in an urban context see Pullan, *Rich and poor in Renaissance Venice*; W. J. Marx, *The development of charity in medieval Louvain* (New York, 1936) and see above n. 12. For a study of urban poor relief in the early modern era, A. L. Beier, 'The social problems of an Elizabethan country town: Warwick, 1580–90', in *Country towns in pre-industrial England*, ed. P. Clark (Leicester, 1981), pp. 46–85.

[45] In Cambridge preaching must have been especially frequent due to the existence of large groups of friars of the four mendicant orders, T. H. Aston, G. D. Duncan and T. A. R. Evans, 'The medieval alumni of the University of Cambridge', *Past and present* 86 (1980), pp. 9–86, at pp. 18–19. On the relation between the values of mendicant and urban life see J. Le Goff, 'Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale', *Annales* 25 (1970), pp. 924–46 and B. H. Rosenwein and L. K. Little, 'Social meaning in the monastic and mendicant spiritualities', *Past and present* 63 (1974), pp. 4–32; pp. 20–32; for a more cautious view of this relation see D. L. d'Avray, *The preaching of the friars. Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 216–39.

[46] Génicot, 'Sur le nombre des pauvres', p. 274. Georges Duby sees distress as an almost exclusively urban phenomenon, 'Les pauvres des campagnes dans l'occident médiévale jusqu'au XIIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France* 52 (1966), pp. 25–32; pp. 29–30; Mollat, 'La notion de la pauvreté', pp. 13–14 and *idem*, 'Hospitalité et assistance', p. 45. Charity is related with population growth in H. Hasquin, 'Note sur les origines de l'hôpital Notre Dame à Courtrai (1209–1211)', *Annales de la société belge d'histoire des hôpitaux* 9 (1971), pp. 3–10; p. 8, related to population growth.

[47] On the influence of money on medieval attitudes see A. Murray, *Reason and society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 59–61, 77–83.

of commerce and the smaller craftsmen, coexisted to create a comparative dimension for study.[48]

Of such communities Cambridge is a pregnant example. The existence of the medieval university and the colleges in this medium-sized market town has allowed the survival of abundant sources related to the town's religious institutions. The archives of the Hospital of St John are kept as part of the muniments of St John's College, and this foundation of the main charitable institution of Cambridge, *c.* 1200, on the crest of a wave of hospital foundations, provides a convenient starting point. Its refoundation as a college in 1509–11 augurs the arrival of new times and ideas, in a century which saw momentous political, social and religious change that fundamentally altered the picture of poverty and relief.[49] The study of Cambridge also enables us to compare academic and non-academic charity, and to see whether patronage from the hands of kings, noblemen and prelates heightened the charitable awareness of the burgess community. Throughout the book an attempt will be made to relate the story of one town to what is known of the charitable dilemmas experienced and solutions devised by other medieval towns, bearing in mind the peculiarities of Cambridge, but also shared structural problems and attitudes which render such comparisons valuable.

[48] On the social composition of smaller medieval towns see R. H. Hilton, 'Lords, burgesses and hucksters', *Past and present* 97 (1982), pp. 3–15 and *idem*, 'Small town society in England before the Black Death', *Past and present* 105 (1984), pp. 53–78; J. Le Goff, *Marchands et banquiers du moyen-âge* (Paris, 1956), pp. 42, 47. Some prefer to study charity through the activities of one class, but this limits the relevance of any findings to the working of the class studied, see Rosenthal, *The purchase of paradise*.

[49] The activities connected with the transformation of the hospital into a college are extremely revealing and interesting. However, Lady Margaret Beaufort and John Fisher were exalted personages alien to the context of urban charity in Cambridge. In this work I have chosen to refer to the hospital's end only as an epilogue.